

(1991) un balance actual de la situación del cine en la España posmodernista almodoviana. No cabe duda que el descubrimiento histórico de Caparrós, ciertamente catastrofista, de que «el cine español de estos años está alcanzando cotas erótico-pornográficas superiores a la media de las producciones extranjeras» (p. 359) podría deparar sorpresas a los futuros estudiosos de la historia del cine español aunque eso ya sería otra película.

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CREACIÓN

Rosa Montero. *Bella y oscura*. Barcelona, Seix Barral, 1993, 197 pp.

Bella y oscura, the sixth novel of Rosa Montero, continues what has become a characteristic pattern of the author's narrative trajectory, the creation of a new fictional world that initially appears quite dissimilar to those of preceding novels, but that upon closer analysis reveals many of the same techniques and themes that have come to typify Montero's vision of reality.

In *Bella y oscura* Montero returns to the use of a first-person narrator who recounts the events of a crucial period of her life from a perspective that is distanced by both time and memory. Unlike the unreliable protagonist/narrator of *La función delta* however, the narrator of *Bella y oscura*, who is known to the reader only by her magical, other-self name Baba, foregrounds from the start the problems inherent in the use of memory, «ya no sé si recuerdo o invento» (5). As the novel progresses the reader realizes that this admission is key to the comprehension of the text; the protagonist's verbal concretion of the period that signifies the destruction of her childhood innocence and dreams is her method of coming to terms with these events. This idea is verbalized in the novel by Airelai, the lilliputian storyteller/magician who accompanies the protagonist's family, «a menudo el relato de un suceso es más real que la realidad» (81).

This idea also governs the structure of the novel. The latter is constructed upon a primary narrative line that chronologically traces the arrival of the protagonist in what appears to be Madrid on an oppressive, rainy, cold April night, her reunion with

what is left of her mentally and emotionally disturbed family, her life in the degraded, yet at times magically-lyrical «barrio», and the events that lead up to the long awaited return of her father that unleashes the final, tragically-ironic ending. Branching off from the primary story line are a series of short narrations that constitute thematic and/or temporal digressions. These are narrated by other characters and serve several functions, the most important of which are the first-person narrator perspective, the underlining of the centrality of storytelling to the text, and the incorporation of specific themes.

Although the narrative world that frames the thematic core of *Bella y oscura* is unlike that of previous novels, at times recalling Marsé-like characters and atmosphere and suggestively intertextual with the Spanish literary tradition (67) as well as Montero's own novels (149, 168), the central themes of this novel are at once familiar to Montero's readers, and yet to a certain extent defamiliarized by the child's perspective of this conflictive adult society. This is illustrated by one of the themes central to Montero's novels, that of power and its hierarchy, which is represented here in the microcosm of the «barrio». As the protagonist quickly learns, the neighborhood is governed by a series of implicit rules and an explicit chain of command, both of which echo the corporate hierarchy of *Amado amo* and the governmental/religious one of *Temblor*, and that result in the same concept of the inevitability of the hierarchy, «todo el mundo tiene alguien a quien temer, sólo que unos temen a mucha gente y otros tan sólo a unos poquitos» (134).

Other important themes that reappear in *Bella y oscura* are those of love, desire, solitude, old age, memory, death, and the fugacity of time. Especially interesting is the direction taken by the theme of communication. Present in all of Montero's previous novels, here, through Airelai's lilliputian version of Paradise and the fall from grace, the lack of communication is given an origin, springing from the conjunction of memory, desire, and the articulation of the word.

Despite the fact that the power of the word is linked to negative aspects, it is the gift of the word through the character Airelai that provides the few beautiful and magical moments of escape for the protagonist from her degraded reality. Airelai's capacity to create fascinating worlds and extraordinary adventures temporarily

transports the protagonist to another plane in which dreams, desire, and most importantly happiness, are possible.

This happiness however is ephemeral. Although the title of the novel, which springs from Airelai's vision of the world as at once beautiful and horrible [«esta vida tan bella y tan oscura» (150)], could be understood to imply a certain balance between beauty and horror, those who are familiar with the author's trajectory will not be surprised to find this not so. Yet even for the initiated, the dark tone of the novel and the extensive cruelty of the acts recounted (the torture of the whale, the abuse of the protagonist's family, the burying alive of the Portuguese's baby, etc.), coupled with the absence of the characteristic Montero use of humor, result in a novel that could easily be qualified as the author's most somber reflection on humanity to date.

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José Manuel Caballero Bonald. *Campo de Agramante*. Barcelona, Anagrama, 1992, 298 pp.

En *Campo de Agramante*, Caballero Bonald vuelve a ambientar su nueva obra dentro de sus paros literarios predilectos: Sanlúcar de Barrameda, el Parque Nacional de Doñana, y el *hinterland* de la serranía gaditana. Dentro de esta geografía real va intercalando algunas toponimias y personajes ficticios utilizados en sus novelas anteriores, a saber: los cerros de Alcaduz, la Algaida, Benalmijar, Matafalúa y el viejo Leiston. Esta mixtura de ambientes ya conocidos y antiguos personajes crea una atmósfera novelesca tensada de fantasía que se compagina a la perfección con el título de la obra. Efectivamente, como el veterano literato advierte con un epígrafe tomado del *Persiles* de Cervantes, pretende zambullirnos en una zona de confusión o un lugar de disputas y riñas, es decir, en un campo de Agramante. Pero este cimientto geográfico que es la Baja Andalucía no sólo sirve para potenciar un cierto aire legendario y mitológico, sino que también señala la perplejidad anímica del protagonista, un curioso yo-narrador de hoy cuyo nombre nunca llega a saberse.

Campo de Agramante consta de seis capítulos de extensión pareja y un breve «Preámbulo.» Tanto aquéllos como éste se dividen en varios apartados en los que el protagonista narrador pasa a recordar un nuevo «enigmático episodio» u otra «maraña emocio-